



the
**Episcopal Diocese
of Connecticut**

Judiciary Committee Public Hearing

Monday, March 7, 2011

**TESTIMONY OF THE RIGHT REVEREND JAMES E. CURRY, BISHOP
SUFFRAGAN OF THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CONNECTICUT**

**In SUPPORT of SB-1035
AN ACT REPEALING THE DEATH PENALTY**

Chairman Coleman, Chairman Fox, distinguished members of the committee: My name is James Curry, and I am one of the bishops of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. I speak in support of SB-1035.

The Episcopal Church sets its public policy by the vote of lay persons, clergy and bishops in convention. In 1976 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church reaffirmed its opposition to capital punishment and called on the Dioceses and Members of the Church to work actively to abolish the death penalty in their States. The Diocese of Connecticut has affirmed that position by vote of our 219th Annual Diocesan Convention on October 25, 2003.

In addition, the bishops of the worldwide Anglican Communion meeting in the Lambeth Conference of 1988 passed the following resolution: This Conference urges the Church to speak out against all governments who practice capital punishment, and encourages them to find alternative ways of sentencing offenders so that the divine dignity of every human being is respected and yet justice is pursued.

I wish to focus on two points:

First: All capital crimes are heinous crimes and perpetrators deserve consistent, appropriate punishment. It is our society's response to such crimes that is the issue of this debate. I believe

that society in its response to heinous crimes has the opportunity to act out of our best or worst instincts. The death penalty plays to our worst instincts of revenge. Beyond that studies show that the imposition of the death penalty is arbitrary, racially biased, biased against the poor. There will always be the possibility that the death penalty will be imposed on an innocent person. By abolishing the death penalty we have an opportunity to affirm and respect our dignity as a society. Secondly: My heart breaks for the pain and suffering of victims and their families. We need to do much more to care for the needs of survivors. The death penalty is not the answer. I have been told by some members of victim's families that the death penalty has added additional pain to them by extending painful trials and appeals, giving notoriety to the perpetrator, and making a spectacle out of the legal process. Alternative ways of sentencing, including life imprisonment without possibility of parole, can respect the needs of victim's families for closure and dignity. On behalf of the Episcopal Church, I urge the committee to recommend bill SB 1035, An Act to abolish the death penalty in Connecticut.